

WALKING

Walking a bass line is the most typical approach a bass player takes to playing jazz. While other types of rhythmic activity are available, in swing-oriented jazz, we play quarter notes most of the time. The material presented here is a condensation of my book *Building Walking Bass Lines*. You can get the basic idea from what is shown here, but for a more in-depth understanding, I recommend working through that book and its follow up, *Expanding Walking Bass Lines*.

START WITH THE ROOTS

The primary objective of a walking line is to outline the chord structure of the song and keep the rhythmic flow of the performance moving. Our note choices must contain pertinent information about the harmonic structure of the tune. We will first use the "target/approach" technique to build our bass lines. By choosing a target note, our lines will have a feeling of destination. We will then use approach notes to precede the target note in order to create a sense of movement.

The first order of business is the root motion. Playing the root of each new chord is the first step toward developing a bass line. Here is an example of using the root motion of a progression to create a walking line.

NUMBER 5

◀ [AUDIO-#5.mp3](#)

F#m7^{b5} B7^{b9} Em⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷ A⁷

Dm⁷ G⁷ Em⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cmaj⁷

As a jazz bassist, you will rarely have to read written walking lines. The idea is to make up your own from a chord chart or lead sheet. Now, practice finding the roots of this progression.

NUMBER 6

◀ [AUDIO-#6.mp3](#)

Cm⁷ F⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ A^{b7} G⁷

Cm⁷ C#^{o7} Dm⁷ G⁷ G^{b7} F⁷ B^bmaj⁷

ADDING THE FIFTH

The next note we will target is the fifth. To locate the fifth, start on the root and count up the major scale to the fifth note. The fifth is an important structural element of any chord type. The root, fifth, and octave of a chord, are the infrastructure, while the thirds and sevenths create the characteristic quality of a chord. Because all chords have a root, fifth, and octave, they are good all purpose notes to have at your beck and call. They will enable you to at least function in a song until you learn more about the specifics, such as which chords are major or minor, and which chords have major sevenths or minor sevenths.

Here is an example of using roots and fifths to create a walking line through a blues progression.

NUMBER 7

◀ [AUDIO-#7.mp3](#)

Chord progression for exercise NUMBER 7:

B \flat 7 E \flat 7 B \flat 7 /

E \flat 7 / B \flat 7 Dm7 G7

Cm7 F7 B \flat 7 G7 Cm7 F7

Now practice playing roots and fifths through this short turn-around progression. Look for several different ways to play this. Use different octaves and different fingerboard locations for the same note to find your options.

NUMBER 8

◀ [AUDIO-#8.mp3](#)

Chord progression for exercise NUMBER 8:

Gmaj7 Em7 Am7 D7

play 4 times

APPROACH NOTES

With the root and fifth as our primary targets, we will now add approach notes to give movement to the line. Approach notes precede their target note and create a resolution pattern. This draws on the classic "tension/release" phenomenon that is a significant aspect of all types of music. The approach note creates tension that is released into the target note. An important concept to keep in mind when creating bass lines is gravity. Bass players work with the gravitational pull of the approach/target relationship. Each type of approach discussed has its own type of gravity. Pay attention to how these approaches feel when they connect with their intended target.

CHROMATIC APPROACH

The first approach method we will use is the chromatic approach. A chromatic approach is one-half step above or below the target. In this example, we will use upper and lower chromatic approach notes to target the roots and fifths of the chord progression. Roots will be marked with an "R," fifths with a "5," and chromatic approaches with "chr."

NUMBER 9

▶ [AUDIO-#9.mp3](#)

Chord progression for exercise NUMBER 9: A^b7, D^b7, A^b7, E^bm⁷, A^b7, D^b, A^b7, C^m7, F⁷, B^bm⁷, E^b7, A^b7, F⁷, B^bm⁷, E^b7.

The notation shows a bass line in 4/4 time with chromatic approaches to roots (R) and fifths (5) for each chord. Chromatic approaches are indicated by "chr." above the notes. A double bar line with a slash (/:) indicates a repeat sign.

Now practice using the chromatic approach on this short turn-around progression. Again, look for as many options as you can.

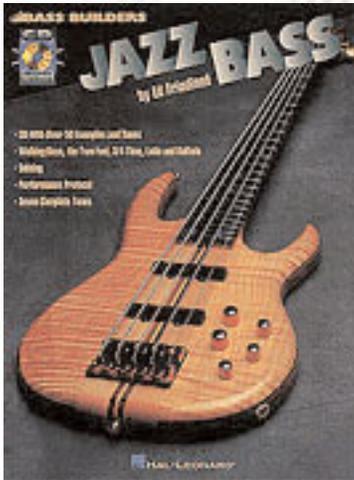
NUMBER 10

▶ [AUDIO-#10.mp3](#)

Chord progression for exercise NUMBER 10: G^m7, C⁷, F^m7, B^b7. The instruction "play 4 times" is written above the final chord.

The notation shows a bass line in 4/4 time with slash notation (//) indicating improvisation for each chord.

FENDER PLAYERS CLUB JAZZ BASS



This lesson is from:
[*Jazz Bass \(Bass Builders\)*](#)
by Ed Friedland.

This book/CD pack features over 50 examples covering walking bass, the two feel, 3/4 time, Latin, and ballads. It covers soloing, performance protocol, and includes seven complete tunes.

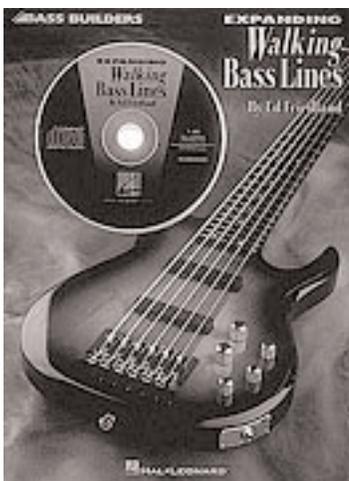
Inventory # HL 695084. Book/CD pack \$17.95 (US).



Other books referred to in this lesson:
[*Building Walking Bass Lines*](#)
by Ed Friedland.

A walking bass line is the most common approach to jazz bass playing, but it is also used in rock music, blues, rockabilly, R&B, gospel, Latin, country and many other types of music. The term 'walking' is used to describe the moving feeling that quarter notes create in the bass part. The specific goal of this book is to familiarize players with the techniques used to build walking bass lines and to make them aware of how the process works. Through the use of 90-minutes' worth of recorded rhythm tracks, players will have the opportunity to put the new learning directly into action. This book gives bassists the tools they need to build their own walking bass lines.

Inventory # HL 695008. Book/CD pack \$17.95 (US).



[*Expanding Walking Basslines*](#)
by Ed Friedland.

A follow-up to Building Walking Bass Lines, this book approaches more advanced walking concepts, including model mapping, the two-feel, several 'must know changes,' and other important jazz bass lessons. CD includes a jazz trio for practicing standard tunes.

Inventory # HL 695026. Book/CD pack \$19.95 (US).